

# Toothbrushing Questions and Answers

## For ECEAP Classrooms

Snohomish County ECEAP and Snohomish Health District

**Where to brush teeth?** Brushing can be done sitting at the table, sitting at circle or standing in front of a sink. If using a sink, children need to be supervised individually.

**Is Group brushing best?** – Monitoring toothbrushing as a group will be less time consuming than brushing at a sink. The purpose of toothbrushing at school is to promote and improve toothbrushing skills as well as to remove any remains from the meal or snack. Group brushing contributes to prevention of tooth decay only when fluoride toothpaste is used. Children need supervision while at the sink or in a group.



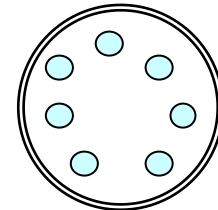
OR



**How to dispense toothpaste** - Dispense no more than a pea-size amount of toothpaste, from a shared tube of toothpaste, around the edge of a plate, onto a piece of wax paper, or an individual paper cup. Each child can 'scoop' toothpaste onto his own brush without touching the toothpaste that another child's brush has touched.



OR



Do not use one tube of toothpaste to dispense toothpaste to each toothbrush. Bacteria will be transferred from one child to the next.



### Why model toothbrushing?

Children aren't ready to brush alone usually until they are 6-8 years old. They practice techniques by watching someone. Teachers can model brushing their own teeth or by demonstrating the areas to be brushed on a model. Later in the year, a child could lead the brushing with the teacher prompting.



### For good brushing:

- Keep mouth open, not too big
- Brush the top and bottom teeth separately



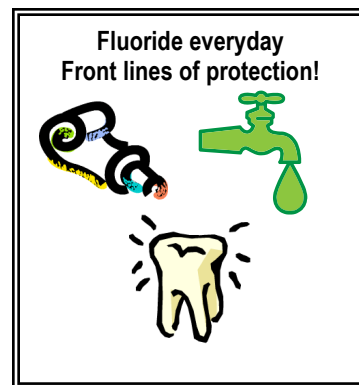
**How to demonstrate brushing?** Routines are good to use for brushing, so that areas are not missed. Do not brush the top and bottom teeth at the same time, i.e. while the teeth are biting together. Use short back and forth motions. Most young children don't have the muscle control for small circles that adults use. Concentrate on helping children brush the outsides AND the inside first, then the top rather than the actual scrubbing technique. Some dentists recommend starting with a different corner of the mouth each time to be sure all teeth get brushed well.

### Sample Brushing Pattern

**Top** Outside: left side-front-right side  
Inside: left side-front-right side  
**Bottom** Outside: left - front - right  
Inside: left - front - right  
Chewing side of top teeth: left, right  
Chewing side of bottom teeth: left, right  
From Bright Futures

**Do they need to spit and rinse?** Yes excess toothpaste must be eliminated by spitting into a cup or sink. If using a cup, give students a napkin, brush, spit into the cup, place the napkin on top and throw it away. Do not teach children to eat or swallow excess toothpaste. We use small amounts of toothpaste to avoid swallowing too much fluoride while children are learning to spit.

Tooth brushing is an easy way to provide fluoride to children's teeth. We want the teeth to have exposure to fluoride every day. Rinsing with water after reduces the effect of the fluoride in toothpaste. If you must let children rinse with water, it should be very little.



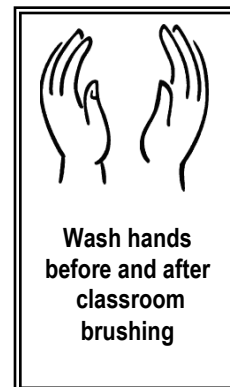
**Perfect? Almost!  
ID on brush and slot,  
please**

#### **How children put toothbrushes away?**

- Students can leave their brushes on a table for the teacher to rinse and put away, as long as the brushes NEVER touch each other or another child's storage space.
- Children can rinse their own brushes and hand them individually to the teacher to put away.
- The student can put the brush away and the teacher can rinse the brush later.
- Children can rinse their brushes and put them in 'their' place with guidance. Do not share storage slots between children.

#### **Do we need to wear gloves to handle toothbrushes?**

**No.** Gloves are not necessary to handle toothbrush handles. Wear gloves if you intend to touch brush bristles or if you have open cuts or sores on your hands.



#### **Why can't we toss the toothbrushes in a bin and sanitize them with bleach?**

Sanitizing toothbrushes is not necessary and may be unsafe. Sanitizing with bleach or by dishwasher does not eliminate all bacteria on a toothbrush. Children are immune to their 'own' bacteria. Store toothbrushes in containers or slots that are never shared with another child's toothbrush. Replace toothbrushes that fall on the floor or come in contact with other toothbrushes. Toothbrushes should never come in contact with other children's toothbrushes. Assure that toothbrushes will not drip on each other.

**Can we spray brushes with mouthwash?** Yes, toothbrushes can be freshened by spraying them with mouthwash. Spraying with mouthwash does NOT replace fluoride toothpaste for brushing. Fluoride mouthwashes do not contain a high enough concentration of fluoride to benefit teeth used in this manner.

**What are acceptable ways to store toothbrushes?** Toothbrushes need to be stored with the 'head' up so they can air dry. They can be stored on a shelf or counter that is undisturbed, in any room but the bathroom. Plak Smakers and Latsa both have plastic Z-shaped containers that can be easily cleaned and used each year. You can also make your own out of unused egg cartons, Styrofoam cups or unused milk containers. The brushes do not need to be covered. If you choose to use a cover, be sure the cover does not touch the brushes and allows air to move freely around the brush. If the cover touches the brushes, it will need to be disposable to avoid contamination of the drying toothbrushes.

Toothbrushes should not be kept in closets, drawers, or encased in small, closed containers where air does not circulate well. Do not use travel toothbrush holders, or individual brush covers, as they do not allow adequate ventilation.

Examples of the toothbrush holders mentioned above.



Latsa #LB20-S 24" long,  
holds 20 toothbrushes with 2" between



Plak Smaker 10 count hole shown  
Plak Smaker 20 count Rack and Brush System Item # 41008